

KEYBOARDS AND MICE

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes the simplest and cheapest parts of your computer can make the most difference to your experience of using it. It's all very well having the latest high-tech graphics card and dual-core processor, but you won't be able to do much with them if your mouse is so full of fluff that you can't select any programs or documents. Similarly, an expensive suite of office software won't be much use if your keyboard gives you cramp after only a few minutes of typing.

This month, we've tested 14 replacement keyboard and mouse sets. The cheapest costs just £14, and most are wireless so you can move them freely around your desk to find the most comfortable position. Many even include the latest laser mouse technology, so they're more accurate than ever. Whether you want a simple wired set for occasional use or a keyboard that makes all-day typing pleasant, we'll help you select your best buy.

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KEY ISSUES

Whether you can touch-type as fast as you can think or you're more of a hunt-and-peck person, you'll need a comfortable keyboard and mouse.

Choosing a... Keyboard and mouse

When buying something as inexpensive as a keyboard and mouse, it's tempting to pick the cheapest set that has the features you need. If you do this, though, you may get an uncomfortable set that needs replacing immediately. Before you buy, you should consider keyboard comfort, which keyboard shape you want and whether you need a wireless set.

THE LEARNING CURVE

Keyboards come in three basic shapes: standard, curved and split. Most people use standard keyboards, which have straight, parallel rows of keys. If you use a standard keyboard and find it comfortable, it makes sense to choose another with this layout. If you find it uncomfortable, consider the other two shapes.

Split keyboards used to be quite common, but we could find only one to include in this test. On a split keyboard the keys used by the left and right hand when touch-typing are separated so that your forearms needn't be parallel when typing. Touch-typists should adjust to a split keyboard fairly quickly, but others are likely to find that their typing slows for some time.

A good compromise is a curved keyboard, where the keys trace a gentle curve. These allow you to move your elbows outwards, but as there's no split between the

keys they're better for non-touch-typists. We've reviewed two in this test.

COLD COMFORT

The key action varies between keyboards, and this greatly affects the experience of using them. If you type regularly, we recommend a keyboard with keys that travel a reasonable distance when pushed and produce a tactile 'click'. Most people find keyboards with a shallow action less comfortable.

To judge the keyboards we used a panel of 12 testers. Each member scored each keyboard between one, for uncomfortable, and five, for very comfortable. We combined the results to get an average score for each keyboard. Our reviews explain which we judged particularly good, and which particularly poor.

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Most of the keyboards and mice here are wireless, so you can place them anywhere on your desk. Most run on AA or AAA batteries, but the Genius TwinTouch LuxeMate Pro includes rechargeable batteries and the Gyratation GO has a rechargeable mouse. In case you don't want to fiddle about with batteries at all, we've also reviewed two standard wired sets.

GENIUS KB 600

★★★★★
£14 inc VAT



The Genius KB 600 is the cheapest set in this test. Surprisingly, though, it's wireless, and has an optical mouse. It has a small black receiver that connects to your computer through a USB port. The keyboard and mouse require different types of battery, which is a bit odd, but two AA and two AAA cells are included in the box. There's no software to install, but you don't need any. The keyboard has a few simple short-cut buttons for tasks such as opening a browser, email and the calculator, plus a volume control.

The KB 600 appears to have been made using a single bucketload of black plastic, but its design is inoffensive enough. The keyboard didn't impress our panel of testers, though, as it feels particularly spongy. The keyboard layout is acceptable and steers clear of many problems found on more expensive sets. This isn't a great keyboard and mouse, but it would suffice for occasional use and at less than £15 it's good value.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, optical mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE 31340115106

SUPPLIER www.lambda-tek.com

DETAILS www.geniusnet.com

✓ Ludicrously cheap

✗ Squishy keys

TRUST Wireless Optical Slimline Deskset

★★★
£15 inc VAT



Trust's Wireless Optical Slimline Deskset is a symphony in black and silver plastic. It includes a small black receiver unit, a mouse with four buttons and a keyboard with some silver short-cut buttons along the top.

Unfortunately, both the keyboard and mouse are poor. The mouse is extremely light, and its wheel has a particularly nasty click. Pushing one of the buttons on the side of the mouse triggered a function in our computer's graphics driver that unexpectedly rotated the display by 90°. Working out how to get it back to normal proved to be a pain.

Most of our testers disliked the keyboard. It has a spongy, squishy feel and an annoying layout. The space bar is minuscule, and the backspace and Enter keys are smaller than we'd like. If you want to spend as little as possible, the Genius KB 600 is cheaper than this set, and slightly better quality.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, optical mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE DS-3200

SUPPLIER www.microdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.trust.com

✓ Very cheap

✗ Squishy keys; clunky mouse wheel

MICROSOFT Black Value Pack Comfort Curve 2000 OEM

★★★★★
£18 inc VAT



As well as the colourfully packaged products that are sold to consumers, many firms make OEM products. These are designed to be used when building a PC system and usually come in a simple brown cardboard box. This Microsoft OEM keyboard and mouse set costs just £18 including VAT.

The Black Value Pack Comfort Curve isn't wireless, so it needs two USB ports. Some people prefer a wired keyboard and mouse, as there are no batteries to worry about, while others find cables annoying. The wired Microsoft wheel mouse is excellent, though. It looks smart and its scroll wheel feels pleasant.

The keyboard isn't bad, either. Our panel of testers liked the slightly clicky keys, but the curved layout has drawbacks. The main casualty is the left Shift key, which is very small and hard to find with your little finger. This is a good set, but the Wireless Optical Desktop 1000 costs just £4 more and is even better.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Curved keyboard, optical mouse, wired connection, USB interface

PART CODE 1920-3072 SUPPLIER www.pcnextday.co.uk

DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk

✓ Good mouse

✗ Not wireless; tiny Shift key

GENIUS TwinTouch LuxeMate Pro

★★★★★
£20 inc VAT



Despite costing just £20 including VAT, the TwinTouch LuxeMate Pro is the only fully rechargeable keyboard and mouse set in this group. It uses standard AA rechargeable batteries, and comes with a charger that clips neatly to the wireless receiver. The keyboard and mouse use two batteries each, but six are included, so you can keep two on charge in case either the keyboard or mouse runs out.

This is clever, but sadly the keyboard isn't great. It has an integrated scroll wheel, which is handy, but our panel of testers disliked the shallow keys. The keyboard has a slightly odd layout too, with the Home key relocated to sit between the Ctrl and Windows keys.

The mouse is better. It has a pleasantly heavy feel, and looks good. This set is impressively good value, but we'd recommend choosing a keyboard with good, clicky keys rather than one with rechargeable batteries.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, optical mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE 31340064101 SUPPLIER www.lambda-tek.com
DETAILS www.geniusnet.com

✓ Rechargeable; spare batteries included

✗ Shallow, uncomfortable keyboard

MICROSOFT Black Value Pack 2.0 PS2 OEM

★★★★★
£22 inc VAT



Like the other Black Value Pack OEM set in the group, this set is not wireless and requires two USB ports. Unlike the other set, though, it also includes two PS/2 adaptors. If you have a desktop PC, this is a good way to keep your USB ports free for other peripherals.

The mouse included here is exactly the same as the one included in the cheaper OEM pack. It's simple, but works perfectly well and looks fine. Unlike the Comfort Curve pack, though, this set includes a standard, straight keyboard. All the keys are well proportioned, and there are a few useful short-cut buttons. A lever on the left of the keyboard, marked "zoom", is handy for scrolling up and down long documents.

This is a decent wired keyboard and mouse at a reasonable price. Microsoft's own Wireless Optical Desktop 1000 is just as cheap, though, and slightly better.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, optical mouse, wired connection, USB interface
PART CODE 1910-3066

SUPPLIER www.pcnextday.co.uk

DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk

✓ Decent keyboard; good mouse

✗ Not wireless

MICROSOFT Wireless Optical Desktop 1000

★★★★★
£22 inc VAT



BUDGET BUY This is the cheapest Microsoft

wireless set in the group. Like most of the products here, it's made from black and grey plastic and looks rather bland. It takes four AA batteries, and a set is included in the box.

The mouse included with this set is simple, but feels good and works well. Similarly, the keyboard is fairly basic. It has a standard, straight layout and a few short-cut buttons along the top. A button marked F-Lock converts the function keys to extra short cuts. Our testers rated its slightly clicky keys and pleasant layout in the top three in this group.

The keyboard has a spill-resistant design, with channels to drain away any liquid that falls on it. This could be handy if, like us, you regularly fling cups of coffee across your desk. If you type all day we recommend paying more for the Logitech LX710, but for more sporadic typists this is a great buy.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, optical mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE x10-95902 SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com
DETAILS www.microsoft.co.uk

✓ Good keys; nice mouse

✗ Looks a little bland

LOGITECH Cordless Desktop S-510

★★★★★
£30 inc VAT



In a group dominated by black plastic slabs, Logitech's Cordless Desktop S-510 stands out. The black and silver mouse is the cheapest in the group to have a tiltable wheel, and is pleasant to use. Its 'invisible optic' mechanism doesn't produce the red glow normally associated with optical mice. We can't imagine how this is useful, but it's unusual. Oddly, the keyboard and mouse use different batteries.

The keyboard has a standard straight layout, with media and short-cut keys lined up down the edges rather than across the top. Overall our panel of testers liked the slightly clicky keys, and it was rated as one of the five most enjoyable keyboards to use. Logitech's receiver, which plugs into a USB port, is small and smart looking.

This is a nice keyboard and mouse set, but its keyboard isn't quite as good as the cheaper Microsoft Wireless Optical Desktop 1000. It's good, but not great value.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, optical mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE 967557-0120 **SUPPLIER** www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.logitech.com
☒ Decent keyboard; nice mouse
☒ Optical Desktop 1000 is cheaper and better

LOGITECH Cordless Desktop Comfort Laser

★
£40 inc VAT



Split keyboards were fairly common a few years ago, and some people find them more comfortable than standard, straight keyboards. They're becoming rare, though, and Logitech's Comfort Laser is the only one in this test.

Our test panel included several people who habitually use a split keyboard, but even they disliked the Comfort Laser. It has a few odd-sized keys, but the main problem is the way the keys feel. They're soft and squishy, and the space bar feels particularly loose and unpleasant. Overall, our panel of usability testers gave it the lowest score in the group.

The mouse is better, with a decent wheel that tilts and clicks as well as scrolling. It's suitable for right-handed users only, though, and three of the seven buttons are tiny. The receiver unit is small and smart looking. Even if you prefer a split keyboard layout, we recommend steering well clear of this set.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Split keyboard, laser mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE 967692-0120
SUPPLIER www.dabs.com **DETAILS** www.logitech.com
☒ Mouse has lots of buttons
☒ Particularly poor keyboard

MICROSOFT Remote Keyboard for Windows XP Media Center Edition

★★★★★
£44 inc VAT



If you have a Media Center PC connected to your TV, using a keyboard and mouse may be inconvenient. This product is designed to be used from a sofa. It sits on your lap, and a built-in pointer control replaces the mouse.

The keyboard is covered with buttons for Media Center tasks. The mouse pointer control in the top right-hand corner is easy to use with your thumb, and special buttons for left- and right-click are on the opposite side. Our panel rated the keyboard in the middle of the group.

This keyboard uses infrared rather than radio, so you need a line of sight between the keyboard and its receiver. There's no receiver in the box, but if you have a Media Center remote this works with the same receiver.

We prefer the Genius Media Cruiser, which uses a more traditional radio link.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, integrated touch stick mouse, IR wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE x11-02961
SUPPLIER Gladiator 08456 444666
DETAILS www.microsoft.co.uk
☒ Integrated pointer; Media Center buttons
☒ Uses infrared and requires existing receiver

GENIUS LuxeMate 810 Media Cruiser

★★★★★
£47 inc VAT



Genius's Media Cruiser is designed for the same environment as Microsoft's Remote Keyboard for Windows XP Media Center Edition. It sits on your lap, and includes all the controls needed to manage a Media Center PC.

The Media Cruiser's keyboard is small, with no number pad and a layout similar to those of notebook keyboards, but our test panel liked the feel of its keys and rated it among the five best in the group. Like Microsoft's keyboard, it has a pointer control on its top-right corner, and mouse buttons on the top left. The default pointer setting moves the cursor very slowly, and the maximum speed is also low. It's fine for Media Center use, though.

The Media Cruiser includes a radio receiver that connects to your PC via USB. It's a better system than the infrared signal Microsoft's keyboard uses. This isn't as good as a keyboard and separate mouse for everyday use, but for Media Center owners it's the best choice.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, integrated touch stick mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE GK-060003/K
SUPPLIER www.dacomputers.com
DETAILS www.geniusnet.com
☒ Integrated pointer; Media Center buttons
☒ Not so handy for a desktop PC

LOGITECH Cordless Desktop LX710 Laser

★★★★★
£50 inc VAT



BEST BUY The LX710 is one of the most expensive keyboard and mouse sets in this group, but if you spend a lot of your time typing it's £50 well spent. The keyboard has a pleasant, clicky action, and was rated as the best in the group by our panel of testers. It has a standard layout, with no undersized or unusually located keys, and includes a smattering of media and short-cut buttons on the sides.

The mouse is equally impressive. It feels weighty in your hand, and will suit both left- and right-handed users. Its scroll wheel tilts and clicks and there are four buttons, although two of these are a little too small to be used comfortably. The receiver is the shape of a USB flash drive, but a cradle with an extension cable enables you to put it on your desk if you wish.

This is a great keyboard and mouse, and is easily the best set in the test. It's our Best Buy.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, laser mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE 967670-0120
SUPPLIER www.argos.co.uk
DETAILS www.logitech.com
☒ Fantastic keyboard
☒ Great mouse

MICROSOFT Microsoft Wireless Laser Desktop 6000

★★★
£50 inc VAT



The Wireless Laser Desktop 6000 is the most expensive Microsoft set in this test, but it was the one our testers liked the least. The keyboard has Microsoft's Comfort Curve shape, which includes a shrunken left Shift button. The keys are clicky but have very little travel, and the short-cut buttons round the edge have virtually no travel at all. When you get it out of the box the keyboard's front edge is raised far off the desktop by a stand. Once we worked out how to detach this it was far more comfortable.

The Microsoft laser mouse is better, but its right-handed shape won't suit everyone. It has a tiltable wheel, but we prefer the mouse included with Logitech's Desktop LX710 Laser. The Desktop 6000 includes the same large receiver as the cheaper Microsoft sets.

The set has a decent mouse, but at this price we expect a better keyboard. Logitech's Desktop LX710 Laser is far better, and costs no more.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Curved keyboard, laser mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE x11-97806-02 **SUPPLIER** www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.microsoft.co.uk
☒ Decent mouse
☒ Tiny Shift key

KEYBOARDS AND MICE

LOGITECH

Cordless Desktop MX3000 Laser

★★★★★
£56 inc VAT



This set includes the same mouse as the Desktop Comfort Laser. It has seven buttons and a good wheel, but it's suitable only for right-handed users, and three of its buttons are tiny.

Fortunately, the keyboard in this set is a cut above the Desktop Comfort keyboard. It has a traditional straight design with a standard key layout. Our panel of testers rated it as one of the three best keyboards in this test. The top is smattered with short-cut and media control buttons, as well as a rotary volume control. On the left there's a wheel for scrolling through documents, as well as a button that closes the currently active window.

This is a decent keyboard set, but it's overshadowed by Logitech's own Cordless Desktop LX710 Laser, which has an even better keyboard and costs less.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, laser mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface
PART CODE 967553-0120 SUPPLIER www.lambda-tek.com
DETAILS www.logitech.com
 Good keyboard; lots of mouse buttons
 LX710 keyboard is better and cheaper

GYRATION

GO 2.4 Optical Air Mouse and Compact Keyboard

★★★
£90 inc VAT



Gyratation's GO is unusual.

For one thing, it costs a whopping £90 including VAT. It includes a small, notebook-style keyboard and a gyroscopic mouse.

The keyboard is small with no number pad, and some of the keys are in unusual places, such as a Function key where the left Ctrl key should be. At the top it has several media and short-cut buttons. It uses four AAA batteries.

The mouse is stranger still. You can use it on a desktop, or by moving it in the air while holding a trigger button. This could be useful for presentations or RSI sufferers, but when sitting at a desk we prefer a normal mouse. If you want a mouse you can use by waving your hand around this one works well, but the package as a whole is very expensive.

KEYBOARD AND MOUSE SET Standard keyboard, optical and gyroscopic mouse, RF wireless connection, USB interface PART CODE GC215MCKUK
SUPPLIER www.quietpc.com DETAILS www.gyratation.com
 Gyroscopic mouse works well
 Particularly expensive

Labs verdict

Keyboards and mice

We were amazed by the variable quality of keyboards and mice submitted for this test. They range from wonderfully comfortable to remarkably uncomfortable, and there's little correlation between this and price.

If you want a simple, inexpensive wired keyboard and mouse, we recommend the Microsoft Black Value Pack Comfort Curve 2000 OEM, which costs just £18 including VAT. The keyboard has a small left Shift key, but at this price we can forgive a lot.

You needn't pay much more for the convenience of a wireless set. Microsoft's Wireless Optical Desktop 1000 costs just £22 including VAT, but its keyboard is one of the most comfortable in the group and it has a good mouse. It's our Budget Buy.

If you type long documents, it's worth investing more. Logitech's Cordless Desktop LX710 Laser was universally liked by our panel, and it comes with a great laser mouse. It's our Best Buy.



LOGITECH
Cordless Desktop LX710 Laser
★★★★★



MICROSOFT
Wireless Optical Desktop 1000
★★★★★

BUDGET BUY							
MANUFACTURER	GENIUS	TRUST	MICROSOFT	GENIUS	MICROSOFT	MICROSOFT	LOGITECH
Model	KB 600	Wireless Optical Slimline Deskset	Black Value Pack Comfort Curve 2000 OEM	TwinTouch LuxeMate Pro	Black Value Pack 2.0 PS2 OEM	Wireless Optical Desktop 1000	Cordless Desktop S-510
Rating	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
KEYBOARD							
Shape	Standard	Standard	Curved	Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard
Number pad	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Short-cut keys	10	10	7	8	12	15	12
Volume control	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keyboard battery	2x AAA	2x AAA	N/A	2x AA	N/A	2x AA	2x AAA
MOUSE							
Type	Optical	Optical	Optical	Optical	Optical	Optical	Optical
Buttons	2	4	2	2	2	2	2
Wheel (scroll/tilt/click)	Yes/no/yes	Yes/no/yes	Yes/no/yes	Yes/no/yes	Yes/no/yes	Yes/no/yes	Yes/yes/yes
Battery	2x AA	2x AAA	N/A	2x AA	N/A	2x AA	2x AA
SET							
Connection	RF wireless	RF wireless	Wired	RF wireless	Wired	RF wireless	RF wireless
Interface	USB	USB	USB	USB	USB	USB	USB
Extras	2x AA, 2x AAA batteries	4x AAA batteries	None	6x AA NiMH rechargeable batteries	2x PS/2 adaptors	4x AA batteries	2x AA, 2x AAA batteries, PS/2 adaptor
BUYING INFORMATION							
Price including VAT	£14	£15	£18	£20	£22	£22	£30
Supplier	www.lambda-tek.com	www.microdirect.co.uk	www.pcnexday.co.uk	www.lambda-tek.com	www.pcnexday.co.uk	www.ebuyer.com	www.dabs.com
Details	www.geniusnet.com	www.trust.com	www.pcnexday.co.uk	www.geniusnet.com	www.pcnexday.co.uk	www.microsoft.co.uk	www.logitech.com
Part code	31340115106	DS-3200	1920-3072	31340064101	1910-3066	x10-95902	967557-0120

BEST BUY							
MANUFACTURER	LOGITECH	MICROSOFT	GENIUS	LOGITECH	MICROSOFT	LOGITECH	GYRATION
Model	Cordless Desktop Comfort Laser	Remote Keyboard for Windows XP MCE	LuxeMate 810 Media Cruiser	Cordless Desktop LX710 Laser	Microsoft Wireless Laser Desktop 6000	Cordless Desktop MX3000 Laser	GO 2.4 Optical Air Mouse and Compact Keyboard
Rating	★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★
KEYBOARD							
Shape	Split	Standard	Standard	Standard	Curved	Standard	Standard
Number pad	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Short-cut keys	9	31	29	13	22	30	12
Volume control	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keyboard battery	2x AA	4x AA	2x AA	2x AA	2x AA	2x AA	4x AAA
MOUSE							
Type	Laser	Integrated touch stick	Integrated touch stick	Laser	Laser	Laser	Optical and gyroscopic
Buttons	7	2	2	4	4	7	5
Wheel (scroll/tilt/click)	Yes/yes/yes	No/no/no	Yes/no/no	Yes/yes/yes	Yes/yes/yes	Yes/yes/yes	Yes/no/yes
Battery	2x AA	N/A	N/A	2x AA	2x AA	2x AA	NiMH
SET							
Connection	RF wireless	IR wireless	RF wireless	RF wireless	RF wireless	RF wireless	RF wireless
Interface	USB	Infrared	USB	USB	USB	USB	USB
Extras	4x AA batteries, PS/2 adaptor	4x AA batteries	None	4x AA batteries, cradle for receiver	4x AA batteries	4x AA batteries, PS/2 adaptor	4x AAA batteries, mouse charging cradle
BUYING INFORMATION							
Price including VAT	£40	£44	£47	£50	£50	£56	£90
Supplier	www.dabs.com	Cladiator 08456 444666	www.dacomputers.com	www.argos.co.uk	www.dabs.com	www.lambda-tek.com	www.quietpc.com
Details	www.logitech.com	www.microsoft.co.uk	www.geniusnet.com	www.logitech.com	www.microsoft.co.uk	www.logitech.com	www.gyratation.com
Part code	967692-0120	x11-02961	GK-060003/K	967670-0120	x11-97806-02	967553-0120	GC215MCKUK